

Gulf Coast Paddling Guide

Paddling in the Everglades and Big Cypress

Everglades National Park and the Big Cypress National Preserve share a boarder near Everglades City. Between these two parks visitors can enjoy scenic canoe trails that meander through cypress forests, mangrove tunnels, and shallow estuaries teeming with fish, birds, and other wildlife.

The Big Cypress to the north is dominated by cypress strands with fresh water that flows out into the coastal estuaries of Everglades National Park to the Ten Thousand Islands. The mix of fresh and salt water provides ideal conditions for paddlers to view alligators, wading birds, dolphins, manatees, and osprey.

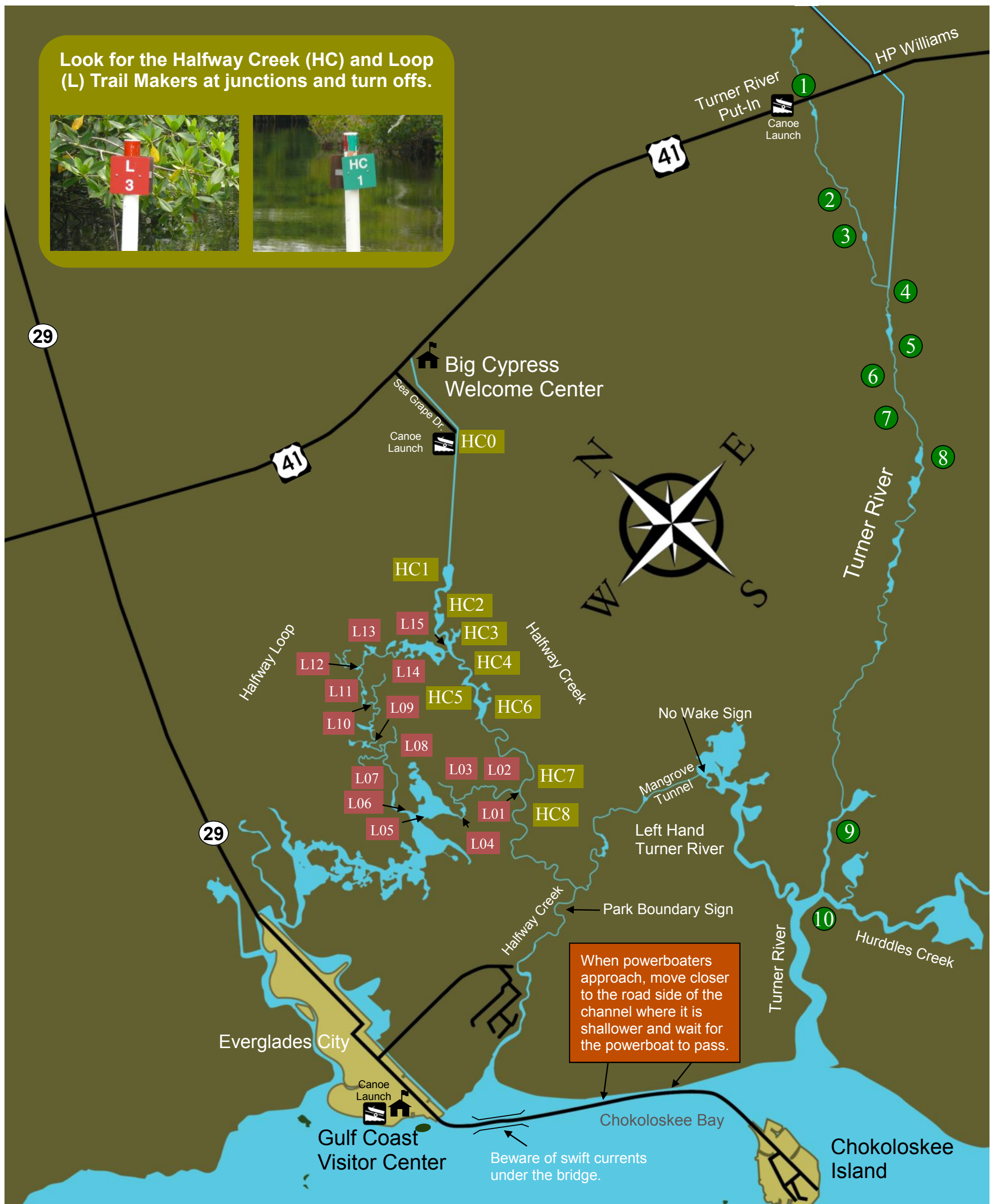
While the trails are accessible year-round, most paddlers attempt them during the winter months when it is cooler and there are less mosquitos. Paddling times vary from two to seven hours depending on winds, tides, paddling speeds, and which trails you choose.

These trails can be difficult for inexperienced paddlers or under certain conditions. Paddling against the tide, fighting a headwind, or being unprepared for the weather or mosquitoes can make for a very strenuous paddle. You can get information about the weather, tides, and conditions of the trails at the Gulf Coast Visitor Center (239) 695-3311 or at the Big Cypress Welcome Center (239) 695-4758.

Leave No Trace

- Follow the outdoor ethics of “Leave no Trace.” Leave what you find, minimize your impact, respect the wildlife, be considerate of other visitors, dispose of waste properly, plan ahead, and be prepared.
- Read all the safety guidelines on page 3 before attempting any canoe trips.



A red rectangular marker with a white 'L' and the number '3' is attached to a mangrove tree. The tree has green leaves and is situated in a wetland area with water visible in the background.

Turner River Canoe Trail

The Turner River is accessible from the canoe launch on US 41. From the beginning of the river to Chokoloskee, it is 8.5 miles and the Gulf Coast Visitor

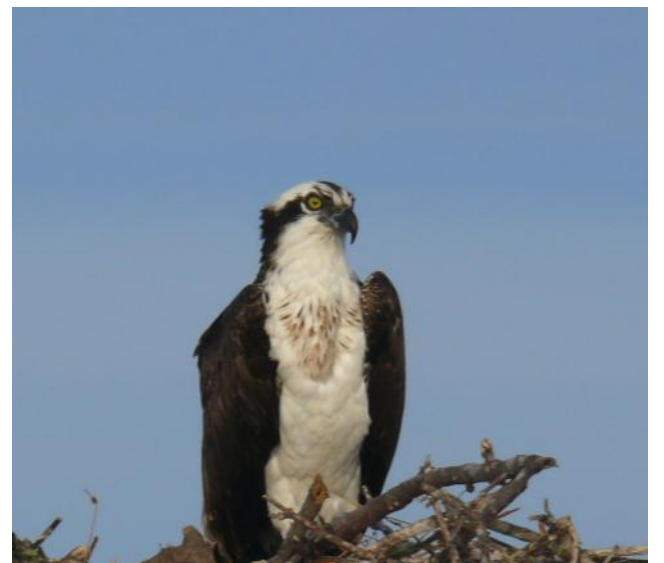
Center is an additional 3 miles. Allow 5-8 hours. Alligators are in the area. Keep a safe distance and give them the right of way.

- 1 Canoe launch on US 41:** Paddle along the canal then turn right under the bridge.
- 2 Entrance to 1st mangrove tunnel:** Watch for low branches and roots. This tunnel is short, about 2/10 of a mile.
- 3 Small Pond:** At the exit of the 1st mangrove tunnel lies a small pond. While it may seem like a dead-end, look to the right for the opening to the next tunnel. This tunnel is longer than the first.
- 4 Junction with the Turner River Canal:** The Turner River route swings south to the right. The old Turner River Canal is visible to the left. This canal has been plugged to restore water to the Turner River.
- 5 Four-Way Junction:** Here the waterway widens. The trail continues straight ahead with sawgrass prairies on both sides.
- 6 Mangrove Tunnel:** This tunnel is short, and opens into a transition zone of sawgrass on your left and mangrove trees on your right.
- 7 Important Turn!:** As you paddle along the sawgrass/mangrove zone you will enter a small pond. The trail looks like it might continue straight along the sawgrass/mangrove area. It does not. The canoe route is on the right, where careful observation will reveal the mangrove tunnel entrance. This tunnel is longer - 4/10 of a mile. In the tunnel you will pass a USNPS Boundary Marker.
- 8 Tunnel Exit:** The river widens and the trail passes through a series of lakes.
- 9 Small Creek:** On the left you may notice a creek leading to a small lake. The route to Chokoloskee continues straight ahead.
Watch for Powerboats and Move out of their Way!
- 10 Hurdles Creek / Left Hand Turner River:** On the left you will see Hurdles Creek. Continue straight and watch for Left Hand Turner on the right. Chokoloskee Island is 2.4 miles straight ahead. Follow the causeway to the Gulf Coast Visitor Center. For a longer trip, take Left Hand Turner River and go down Halfway Creek to the visitor center.

Halfway Creek and Loop Trails

The Halfway Creek and Loop Trails are accessible from the Gulf Coast Visitor Center in Everglades City or from the Big Cypress Welcome Center on Sea Grape Drive off of US 41. The Creek is 7.3 miles long from the Big Cypress Welcome Center to the Gulf Coast Visitor Center. The upper loop is an additional 3.7 miles.

The Halfway Creek loop from the Gulf Coast Visitor Center to the Turner River and back is 11 miles. Allow 4-8 hours for these trails.



Boater Safety

-Know Before You Go-

- Check the weather forecast before departing. Do not paddle when there is lightning. If you get caught in a storm, stay as low as possible and head for the nearest shoreline, and remain low until the storm passes.
- Make sure each boat has paddles, a whistle, life jackets for each person, plenty of water, sunscreen, sunglasses, mosquito repellent, and one throwable device (cushion, life ring, etc.) per vessel. You should also have bow and stern lines for tying up your boat.
- Make sure gear is secured to the boat in case of tipping. Use a dry bag, and avoid taking valuables (especially items easily damaged by water) with you.
- Winds, tides, powerboat wakes, gear storage, and people all affect the stability of your boat.
- The launch at the Gulf Coast Visitor Center is very muddy at low tide and you can get stuck. Stay to the right side when launching, where it is firm.
- Clean-up all trash; pack it in, pack it out.
- There is limited parking and no overnight parking at the Turner River canoe launch. Be sure to make arrangements for a pick-up or park a second vehicle at your end point to shuttle you back. The northern portions of the river may be impassable if the water level is too high or too low. Ask the rangers at the visitor centers before you go.
- Do not feed or harass alligators or other wildlife. Animals that are habituated to human food can be dangerous.
- All plants, animals, shells, feathers, bones and artifacts are protected resources and removal is prohibited.
- Closed toed shoes are recommended to avoid injury. Sharp objects, such as oysters and barnacles are common on the bottom, on rocks, on mangrove roots, and on the Sandfly Island dock.
- Most trails do not have trail markers or they may be missing. A compass and nautical chart are always recommended.
- Paddlers will encounter powerboats. Angle into the wake of a boat to minimize the chance of overturning. If you are being passed by a powerboat, get to the side and stop paddling. Allow for the boat to pass before continuing on your way.
- If you do tip over, don't panic or let go of your boat. In many areas the water is shallow and you may be able to stand.
- Before taking any canoe trail, file a float plan with a friend or relative and let them know when you plan to return. If you do not check in with them at your predetermined time, that person should notify the park's 24-hour dispatch at (305) 242-7740.

Sandfly Island Loop

This trip is 5 miles and can take between 2.5 - 4 hours. Add one hour to walk the one mile trail on the island.

Add at least one hour if traveling against the wind and tides. If you decide to stop at Sandfly Island, please use the beach area next to the dock, as the dock can be slippery and dangerous. Always tie up your boat.

This map is intended as a reference only. For more accurate information, purchase nautical chart #11430 or its equivalent from area stores.



Tides

Tides can be very swift in Sandfly Pass and other channels making for a difficult and strenuous paddle. Tide charts are available at the Gulf Coast Visitor Center or online.

Logistics

Rent a canoe or kayak from the National Park Service concession, one of many local businesses, or bring your own. If you rent, make sure you know what time your boat should be back. There is a public canoe and kayak launch behind the Gulf Coast Visitor Center. Try to time your trip to take advantage of rising and falling tides.

When crossing the bay, keep some distance from the markers to avoid powerboat traffic. In Sandfly Pass, it is important to stay to the sides, as powerboats often use the center of the pass.

Everglades National Park is a protected area. Please leave everything as you find it. Do not remove or disturb any animals, plants, artifacts, seashells, bones, or other objects you may discover, so that others may enjoy them as well.

